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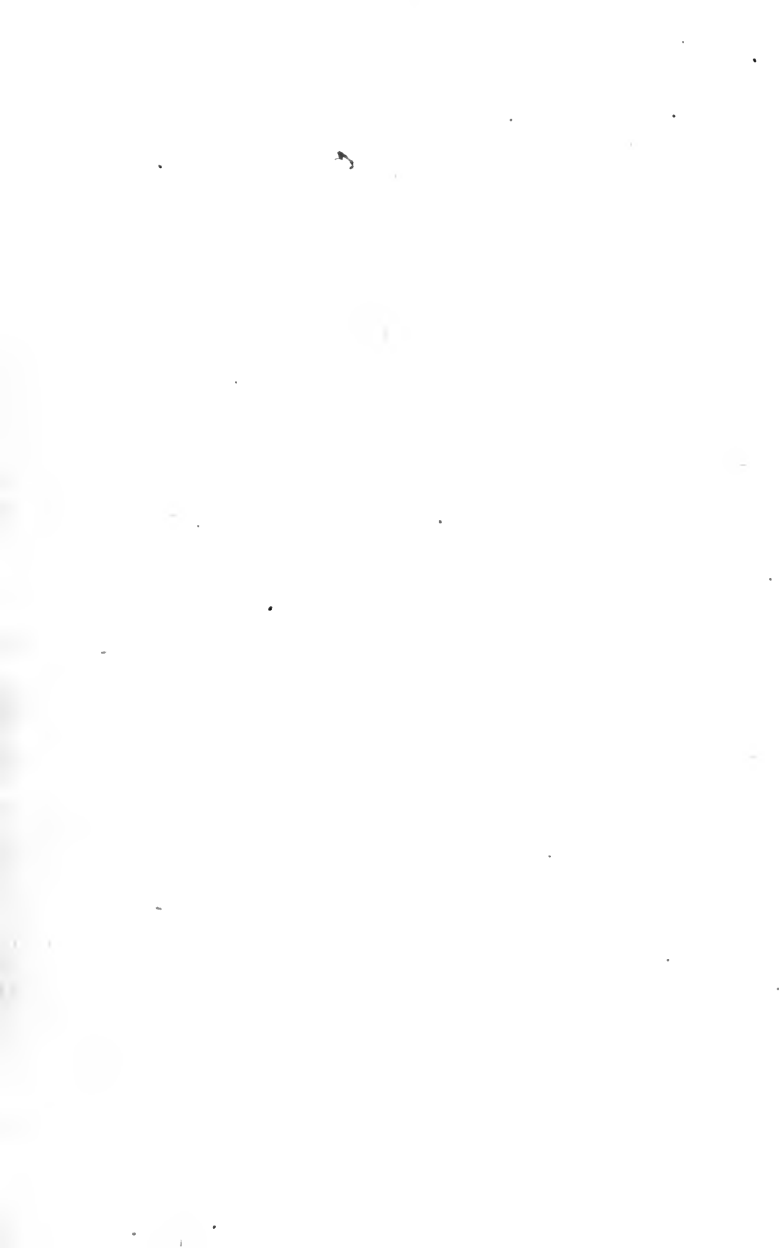
AXEL





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A X E L.



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# A X E L.

A POEM.

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH

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## A X E L.

### I.

**T**HE olden times to me are dear,  
And warlike Charles's hero-story ;  
For high of heart as conquering  
glory,

And blithe as innocence they were.  
O'er northern lands, with rainbow sheen,  
Their bright reflection still is seen ;  
And airy warriors one may view  
In yellow scarf and kirtle blue,  
That " come like shadows and depart,"  
I see ye now with beating heart,—  
Men of an epoch mightier far,  
With sword and buff-coat train'd to war.

## II.

I saw in childhood's earliest day  
One veteran from Charles's band  
Like to a ruin'd trophy stand;  
His comrades long had pass'd away.  
All that the simple sire possess'd  
Of silver, round his temples shone;  
With wrinkles on his front impress'd  
Like runes on some memorial stone.  
Poorest of all, yet firm and bold  
In deepest want, as when of old  
Against the foe his part he play'd—  
A forest hut his dwelling made;  
And there I saw two treasures stored,  
His bible, and time-honour'd sword  
With "Charles the Twelfth" upon its blade—  
The soldier-king's achievements bold,  
Since in a hundred annals told;  
(For wide the eagle soar'd around;)  
Lay buried in his aged mind,  
Like wars rude relics that we find  
Within some champion's grassy mound.

Oh ! when he spoke of what befell  
 The monarch and his “ lads in blue,”  
 How high and strong his utterance grew ;  
 How keen around his glances fell !  
 And vigorous as the sword-stroke rang  
 Each accent from his lips that sprang.  
 Far in the night he sate, and praised—  
 His hero’s unforgotten fame ;  
 And, when he mention’d Charles’s name,  
 With reverent hand his hat he raised—  
 Enraptured at his knee I stood,  
 (In those young days no further reaching),  
 And, as I listen’d to his teaching,  
 Each wondrous tale of strife and blood  
 Sank deep in childhood’s memory ;  
 And oft their shadowy forms I see.  
 As lilies, hid ’neath Winter’s snow,  
 When Spring returns their growth renew.

III.

Long since the old man on his bier  
 In peace was laid ; the tale I tell

Was his ; thou North ! receive it well,  
And give to Axel's name a tear.  
I sing with weak and borrow'd strain,  
Simple my verse, my rhymes are plain.

## IV.

In Bender's wall defeated sate  
Our King ; his realm lay desolate ;  
Tarnish'd his name, before so bright ;  
And like a warrior hurt in fight,  
His people, yet untaught to yield,  
Fought on its knee, behind its shield.  
All hope was lost, all trust was gone,  
Save in the monarch's breast alone.  
What though the storm's remorseless blast  
Had rent the leaves of fate's dark book,—  
What though in mortal terror shook  
The quaking earth, yet he stood fast,  
Unmoved ; as mocks the bomb-proof tower  
Of shot and shell the fiery shower.  
Like some tall rock that spurns the wave ;  
Like valour sculptured o'er a grave.

V.

One evening he to AXEL said,  
 “ Here is a letter,”—and he laid  
 The missive in his hands, “ now ride  
 By day and night, ’gainst time and tide,  
 Until thou come to Swedish land,  
 Then give it to my council’s hand.  
 God prosper thee ! be true and bold,  
 And greet from me our mountains old.”

VI.

What generous joy young Axel felt  
 At such high trust ! within his belt  
 He placed the brief. His sire had died  
 At Holofzin by Charles’s side.  
 Devoted to his king alone,  
 ’Mid din of arms his youth had grown ;  
 One of those forms, with which our North  
 In happiest mood adorns the earth ;  
 Fresh as a rose ; his figure fine  
 Might rival Sweden’s native pine  
 In strength and grace ; his forehead proud

Was like a day without a cloud ;  
Truth in each feature ; and his eye  
With confidence could look on high  
To light's own Father in the sky,  
Or on those lurid realms below,  
Where reigns the lord of endless woe.  
His place was in his sovereign's guard,  
With chosen comrades duly shared ;  
A scanty troop, in number seven,  
Like stars that form the Wain of heaven ;  
Or nine at most, like that bright throng,  
Fair Grecia's sisterhood of song.  
Right sharply were they proved, I ween,  
By steel and fire their worth was seen :  
Young Christain Vikings, like those bands,  
That, issuing from our northern lands,  
In days of old were wont to roam  
On dragon-warships o'er the foam.  
They slept not in luxurious bed,  
But on their war-cloaks underspread ;  
And slumber'd there as soft, as sound,  
In winter on the frozen ground,  
Through drifting storm and sleety showers,  
As on a couch of summer-flowers.



Each warrior of that hardy band  
Could crush a horseshoe in his hand.\*  
If chill'd their frames, they scorn'd to bide,  
Effeminate the hearth beside,  
Nor warmed their limbs in social hall,  
But from the cannon's glowing ball,  
Red as the sun, that o'er the flood  
On winter's eve descends in blood.  
Their warlike rule had ever been  
That never in a foughten field  
One man to less than seven should yield,  
And then his back must ne'er be seen.  
But their young hearts were sorest tried  
By this—that none must homage pay  
To any maid, until the day  
When Charles himself should take a bride.  
How heaven in two soft eyes is dwelling,  
How rosy-red two lips are swelling,  
How bosom-swans, in youthful pride,  
Lie floating on their lake's calm tide,  
Was nought to them—each warrior's hand  
Was consecrated to his brand.

\* The well-known feat of strength attributed to Augustus, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland.

## VII.

Young Axel soon his steed bestrode,  
And joyful night and day he rode ;  
But when he gain'd the Ukraine's bound,  
Lances and sabres flash'd around,  
And ambush'd weapon-clang was heard,—  
“ A letter thou from Bender hast ;  
Dismount and yield it up in haste !”  
He answer'd with his Swedish sword ;  
And straight the foeman, in his gore,  
Sank to the earth, to rise no more.  
His back against an oak he stay'd,  
And so his hero-game he play'd.  
Where'er his weighty falchion gleam'd,  
Life's torrent from its fountain stream'd ;  
And for his oath's sake true and bold—  
Not one 'gainst seven, for that were light,—  
'Gainst twenty foes he stood in fight,  
As brave Rolf Krakè did of old.  
And yet 'twas not for life he fought,  
'Twas fellowship in death he sought ;  
For deep wounds whisper in his ear

With purple lips, that Fate is near.  
About his heart no life-blood play'd,  
Stiff was the hand that grasp'd the blade,  
A misty cloud o'erspreads his sight,  
He faints, he falls, and all is night.—  
But sudden rings the loud halloo,  
Where mettled hound and falcon true  
Urge the fleet chase; and on the green  
A lusty hunter band is seen.  
And foremost, on a dappled gray,  
    In habit green, with cheek of rose,  
    An amazon like whirlwind goes,  
Fair as the day-god's brightest ray.  
The dead lay there, and at the sight  
Her courser starts in wild affright;  
The maiden lightly leaps to ground,  
    And sees outstretch'd his manly form,  
    Like oak that fell'd by northern storm  
Hath crush'd the weaker stems around;  
Still beautiful, though bathed in blood;  
    And o'er him young MARIA bended,  
    As Dian, from her heaven descended,  
Once o'er her loved Endymion stood.

Nor was Endymion's self more fair  
Than he that slumber'd senseless there.  
A feeble spark of life they found,  
And raised him from th' ensanguin'd ground;  
Of plaited twigs a couch they made,  
On this the wounded youth they laid,  
And to the palace gently bare,  
The dwelling of the huntress fair.

## VIII.

There by his bed she sits and sighs,  
All cheerless now and woe-begone;  
And bends upon his features wan  
A look, that mightiest kings might prize.  
Like as in Grecia's groves one sees  
Some wilding rose in fullest flower,  
That blooms and sheds its fragrance o'er  
A sculptured fallen Hercules.  
E'er long he wakens from his trance,  
And looks around with wandering glance;  
Alas! that eye, before so mild,  
Is now all meaningless and wild,—  
“What would'st thou, maid? it is not thine

To weep or tent these wounds of mine ;  
 I am King Charles's warrior true,  
 With woman have I nought to do.  
 My Father in the realms of light,  
     My oath, my sacred oath has heard,  
     And hates me for my broken word ;  
 And yet how lovely to the sight  
 My temptress ! but her spells are o'er ;  
 Satan, avaunt ! nor mock me more.  
 Where is my belt ? my letter where ?  
 'Twas Charles that wrote the brief I bear—  
 Well-temper'd is my father's sword,  
 And well 'twas proved on Moscow's horde ;  
 'Twas sport to make the cravens bleed ;  
 Oh ! that the king had seen my deed !  
 They fell before me on the plain  
 As to the reaper falls his grain.  
 I too, methinks, some blood have lost.  
     My charge I must to Sweden bring,  
     I've pledged my honour to my king ;  
 Up, up ! each moment is of cost."  
 So raves he fever-toss'd, and then  
 In death-like swoon he sinks again.

## IX.

Thus in the youth strove Death and Life,  
And long and doubtful was the strife,  
But Life prevail'd; all danger o'er,  
His eye, with fever fired no more,  
Survey'd with glance though dark, yet mild,  
The angel form that o'er him smiled.  
But there he saw no maiden pale,  
Soft heroine of idyllic tale,  
Whose golden locks like sunbeams float,  
With eyes like blue forget-me-not;  
A daughter of the East is she,  
Whose raven tresses, rich and free,  
In clusters on her cheek repose,  
As midnight broods above the rose.  
Truth on her brow and spirit high  
Sate throned in simple majesty;  
As Victory's image shines afar  
On buckler of the maids of war.  
The hues upon her cheek that glow'd  
Like the first blush of morning show'd,  
Such as the limner's art displays

Anrora with her crown of rays.  
 High swell'd the lilies of her breast,  
 Of youth and health the balmy nest:  
 A soul of fire lay buried there,  
     Yet soft as southern summer-sky,  
     When streams the sunshine from on high,  
 And flowery incense loads the air.  
 Both Heaven and Earth in that dark eye  
 Were striving for the mastery;  
 That one-while glanced as keen and proud  
 As Jove's bird from his thunder-cloud;  
 Or softly as the doves that draw  
 Fair Aphrodite's sky-borne car.

X.

Oh! Axel, scars alone remain  
 Memorials of thy former pain;  
 Thy wounds are heal'd, assuaged their smart;  
 But, say, how fares it with thy heart?  
 Gaze not so fondly on that hand  
 That soothed thy hurts with softest band;  
 That gentle hand, so white, so fine,

No longer must repose in thine :  
'Twill prove to thee more dangerous far  
    Than Turkish hands, in Bender's strife,  
    Array'd against thy monarch's life  
With pistol and with scymitar.  
And those red lips that only ope  
To sing their song of trust and hope—  
'Twere better far that thou should'st hear  
Again those thunders loud and drear,  
That from the cannons of the Czar  
Burst on the field of Pultavá.  
And if, in summer's early glow,  
    To warm thee in the sunshine yonder,  
    Yet weak and faint abroad thou wander,  
With footsteps faltering and slow ;  
Then, Axel ! rest thee on thy sword ;  
    Nor lean upon that rounded arm,  
    Albeit so tender and so warm,  
So soft and white, it might afford  
To Cupid's self, in fairy bed,  
A pillow to support his head.



## XI.

Thou purest bliss to mortals given,  
Foretaste of blessedness in Heaven,  
Freshening with breathings from above  
Our dull sad lot, Immortal Love!  
Thou heart which beats in Nature's breast,  
Our sweetest solace and our best!  
The smallest drop in ocean wide  
Clings to another at its side;  
And in harmonious unison  
The planets circle round their sun  
In bridal dance from pole to pole—  
Thou lingerest in man's darkened soul  
A reflex pale, a parting ray,  
Faint relic of that brighter day  
When 'neath yon vast ethereal dome,  
Its azure star-bespangled home,  
The infant spirit sported free,  
And danced to angel-minstrelsy,  
Till, with its raptures tired and warm,  
It slumber'd on its father's arm.  
Then boundless did its wealth extend,

Its every word was then a prayer,  
Its brethren all were bright and fair,  
And every son of heaven its friend ;  
But, when it fell to earth, its love  
Left half its purity above.  
Yet still the semblance it can trace  
Of angels in the loved one's face ;  
And recognise an angel's tongue  
In Spring's soft voice and minstrel song.  
As the poor Switzer, forced to roam,  
And pining for his mountain home,  
Recalls in some familiar strain  
His childhood and his Alps again.

## XII.

The day was o'er, and evening lay  
In stilly dream upon the west ;  
And, silent as Egyptian priest,  
The stars went forth upon their way.  
A soften'd haze the earth conceals,  
Like some young bride that, fresh and fair,  
With coronal in glossy hair,

Blushes and smiles beneath her veils.  
The weary Naiad sank to rest,  
    On glassy couch her limbs bestowing,  
    And eve, with ruddy lustre glowing,  
Bloom'd like a rose-bud on her breast.  
Each day-imprison'd god of Love  
    Now from his loosen'd fetters gliding,  
    With shaft and bow on moonbeam riding,  
Career'd in freedom through the grove ;  
Whose green arcades form fitting arch  
Through which triumphal Spring shall march.  
From oak-leaf screen the nightingale  
With music thrill'd the listening vale,  
And pour'd its note the glades along  
As soft as Franzen's sweetest song.  
All nature own'd the soothing power,  
The magic stillness of that hour ;  
One heard (so blent was life with rest)  
Each heart-beat in creation's breast.—  
On such delicious eve they ranged  
The garden's labyrinth, and exchanged  
The thoughts that gush from Memory's spring,  
As bridal pairs exchange the ring.

He told her how the homestead stood,  
His mother's dwelling by the wood,  
Whose timbers, wrought of forest pine,  
With ruddy paint so gaily shine ;  
In those far regions of the North,  
His native land, his foster-earth.  
How, when his brothers all were reft  
By fate, and he alone was left,  
In earliest youth he loved to pore  
Some parchment-cover'd volume o'er,  
There on each Saga's tale to dwell ;  
And how his boyish heart would swell  
At legends high and deep, that told  
Of hero-deeds in days of old ;  
How, night by night in childish dream,  
Some steel-clad champion he would seem,  
Like Sigurd who the dragon slew,—  
Like him on giant charger flew  
Through seas of fire to Fame's bright maid,  
Whose castle on the mountain stood  
Deep bosom'd in its laurel wood,  
Where silvery moonbeams round it play'd.  
His soul would seem enslaved, oppress'd

Within the prison of his breast ;  
 Then, rushing from his chamber's thrall,  
 He joy'd to climb the pine-tree tall,  
 The eagle's haunt ; and unconfin'd  
 Sate waving in the northern wind.  
 On ear of cloud he long'd to ride  
 O'er earth and ocean, far and wide,  
 Where Glory calls, where Victory fair  
 Weaves chaplets for the hero's hair ;  
 Where Charles, to manhood scanty grown  
 (Not much his age exceeds mine own)  
 Reaps crowns and sceptres with his brand,  
 And gives them back with godlike hand.  
 " Thus musing till my fifteenth year,  
 I left with many a wistful tear  
 My mother, and to Poland came ;  
 And since that hour 'mid steel and flame,  
 'Mid scenes of blood and deadly strife  
 And cannon-roar, I've pass'd my life ;  
 And yet, withal, whenc'er I've view'd  
 The wild birds tend their callow brood,  
 Or seen, mayhap, some childish band  
 Sport on the brooklet's flowery strand,—

Then all the panoply of war  
Fades from my thought, and flies afar;  
And Peace, with all her smiling train  
Of flowers and groves and golden grain,  
Unfolds her gentle charms again.  
Then at a quiet cottage door  
A maiden stands, with evening's flame  
Bright on her cheek, the very same  
That in my dreams I've seen before;—  
The well-known long-loved features showing;  
And, if my lids I close, no less  
Triumphant o'er forgetfulness  
The picture in my heart is glowing,—  
And in that maiden, in those eyes,  
Thy counterfeit, Maria, lies!"

## XIII.

Answer'd the maid, "How fortunate  
Is man in all his mortal state!  
No yoke he brooks, no burthen bears,  
But free amongst the free he fares.  
Danger and fame are his alone,

And Earth and Heaven his empire own.  
But woman is to man assign'd  
    The passive follower of his lot,  
With soothing hand his wounds to bind,  
    And when they're heal'd to be forgot.  
A patient victim she is given,—  
    He, like the altar's scorching fire,  
    Consumes the offering in his ire,  
And o'er its ashes soars to Heaven.  
On battle-field my father dead,  
My mother's gentle spirit fled,  
The desert child grew free as air,  
    And neither sister knew, nor brother,  
    And in her palace saw none other  
Than serfs that bow'd before her chair ;  
A servile crowd that hugg'd its chains—  
But such base things my soul disdains.  
Hast thou beheld the tameless steed,  
Our boundless steppes heroic breed,  
Fleet as the deer, whose fiery soul  
Hath never stoop'd to man's control ;—  
How with erect and listening ear,  
He marks the sound of danger near,

Then spurns with unshod hoof the plain  
To reach his wilderness again,  
There liveth for himself alone,  
His joys, his combats all his own?  
With such a life, how glad, how free,  
The desert-born appear'd to me!  
Oft have I drawn my bridle-rein,  
And bade them halt upon the plain,  
That mine own Tartar, curb'd when young,  
Might view the race from which he sprung;  
They heed me not, but faster fly  
With hate and terror in their eye.  
So I forsake these tedious walls  
To rove where Nature's freedom calls;—  
At her behest I chase with glee  
Both forest wolf and eagle free;  
Against the bear I've striven for life  
And come victorious from the strife.  
But who can conquer Nature's will?  
    In lowly hut, on feudal throne,  
    As cottage maid or amazon,  
Yet woman must be woman still!  
A tendril that must wither soon



Without some stem to lean upon ;  
Of half her being she is lorn  
    If lonely ;—and it mars her bliss  
    Except she share its blessedness,—  
Her joys, her woes, are all twin-born.  
At times I feel within my breast  
A gentle grief, a sweet unrest ;  
An aimless longing fills my heart  
With sad yet pleasureable smart ;  
And now I soar to realms divine,  
Where myriad stars around me shine ;  
And now, once more, I sink to earth, .  
And this loved home that saw my birth.  
Ye trees, whose growth is blent with mine !  
Ye slopes, whose flowers I've joy'd to twine !  
Thou lofty mount, thou leafy grove,  
Thou brooklet with thy songs of love !  
Where oft I've sate and dream'd alone,  
Cold as the statue's marble stone,  
Now are ye dearer than before—  
Now first, now first I love ye more  
Far than myself ;—now first a feeling  
    I prove within, more pure, more high

Since that blest hour"—then droops her eye,  
And blushes o'er her cheek are stealing;  
Her meaning was but half express'd,  
A faltering sigh disclosed the rest.

## XIV.

The moon lay hid in cloudy wreath,  
The night-bird warbled in the grove,  
And with one long, long kiss of love,  
As warm as life, as true as death,  
Blent in one harmony divine  
Their guileless spirits intertwine.  
So in some sacrificial fire  
Two jets of flame in kiss unite,  
And, meeting, burn more warm, more bright,  
And nearer unto Heaven aspire.  
The world had vanish'd from their sight,  
And Time stood moveless in his flight;  
For though all mortal things that be  
Of Time the rule and measure own,  
The kiss of Love and Death alone  
Are children of Eternity.

If Fate had set this globe in blaze,  
 Its fires had never reach'd their gaze;  
 Or if the skies in fragments fell,  
 They ne'er had heard the mighty knell.  
 Like Genii of the South and North  
     'Mid Nature's ruin close embraced  
     They still had stood; and thus had pass'd  
 Unwittingly to Heaven from Earth.

XV.

Young Axel was the first to break  
 That blissful trance, and thus he spake.  
 " Bear witness to me Heaven and Earth,  
 And thou, bright Honour of the North,  
 Witness my sword, and every star  
 That lookest on us from afar,  
 As white-robed maids in bridal shine,  
 Now and for ever thou art mine !  
 How blest the man to whom 'twere given  
 To choose some tranquil earthly Heaven,  
 Some vale from wars and tumult free,  
 And there to live and die with thee !

As yet my vow, my sacred oath,  
Forbids the happiness of both ;  
My oath, with pale and hateful mien,  
Comes spectre-like our loves between,  
And thrusts betwixt our bosoms warm  
Its icy hand, its clay-cold arm.  
I may not break the oath I've ta'en,  
Yet fair release may surely gain.  
Now must I hence—when flowery May  
Shall bid us to her festal day ;  
On Love's own wings I'll hither ride,  
To seek and claim thee for my bride ;  
My heart meanwhile with thee must dwell,—  
Farewell ! till then, a long farewell !”

## XVI.

Such were his vows ; and with the word  
He dons his belt, he grasps his sword ;  
And straight begins his venturous ride  
Across the Czar's dominions wide.  
In forest brake he hides by day,  
And, nightly, steers his dubious way

By those unerring signs on high,  
 The gems that stud our northern sky.  
 His guide was Charles's glittering Wain,  
 That ne'er is plunged beneath the main;  
 That radiant car with silver pole,  
 And wheels with naves of gold that roll.  
 Thus, through a thousand risks he gain'd  
 The royal burgh on Mälar's\* strand.  
 With joy the wondrous tale they heard  
 Of foes escaped and perils dared.  
 And he himself, as Charles had bade,  
 His brief before the council laid.

XVII.

Maria in her lonely halls  
 Sighs Axel's name; in every glade,  
 In every dell, the sorrowing maid  
 Her absent lover's form recalls.  
 "What means the oath, his soul that bound,  
 And cast its spell our loves around?  
 E'en now perchance, in northern land,

\* Stockholm, situated on the Mälar Lake.

Some maiden claims his promised hand;  
Some earlier flame—yet can there be  
Two several loves? O! not with me,  
Thou maid of snow! or thou or I  
A sacrifice to love must die!  
Thou dost not, and thou canst not, know  
What fires in southern bosoms glow.  
What though between us rolls that main  
Whose waves are bound in icy chain;  
Beyond thy snow-capp'd mountains high  
I'll seek thee out and thou must die!  
Yet—Axel left his northern land  
When still a child—his native strand  
He saw not since, and love flies far  
From weapon-clang, and din of war.  
His lofty brow was honour's throne;  
No treachery there but truth alone.  
And, as, where crystal waters flow,  
The sunbeams pierce the depths below;  
So I myself through that blue eye  
Down to his inmost soul could spy.  
O! wherefore, wherefore didst thou part?  
What hast thou sworn? to crush this heart?

In empty space my voice is lost  
Like some lone widow's churchyard sigh,  
Like some fond dove that mourns on high,  
Whose plaints upon the wind are toss'd.  
He answers not! he cannot hear!  
Forests and billows bar the way;  
What if I follow him? yet, nay;  
Such deed a woman may not dare.  
A woman, yes! yet still I can  
Assume the sword and seem a man.  
Well do I know the steed to tame,  
Firm is my seat, and sure my aim.  
From danger oft I've scorn'd to fly,  
When life or death was on the die.  
Sure the suggestion was divine;  
Now Axel, Axel, thou art mine!  
I'll seek thee in thy northern home;  
For thee, for thee, the world I'll roam!  
And war shall bear me on its wing,  
Till from thy lips thine oath I wring.

## XVIII.

No pause she knew ; so said, so done ;  
With woman thought and act are one.  
About her locks of raven hue  
The soldier's simple hat she threw ;  
The buff-coat veil'd her bosom's pride,  
A crooked sabre graced her side ;  
With sulphury stores her pouch was lined,  
The deadly carbine hung behind ;  
A belt around her waist she wore,  
Like cestus famed in Grecian lore ;  
Her lips a feign'd moustache encloses,  
Like mourning-crape around two roses.  
She seem'd, disguised as warrior bold,  
Eros all arm'd, like him of old,  
Whom Clinias' son \* in many a field  
Bore painted on his glittering shield.

## XIX.

“ Farewell, farewell ! my father's home  
And mine : yet shortly will I come

\* Alcibiades.



To tread thy friendly halls again  
 With love and gladness in my train ;  
 But here no longer must I stay ;

I need both secresy and haste.

O Night ! thy mantle round me cast,  
 And speed me on my dangerous way.”  
 Lo ! there upon the subject land  
 Bought dearly by its conqueror’s brand,  
 In full view of the careless North,  
 Stretch’d Peter’s new-built city forth,  
 That now on mortgaged realms looks down,  
 And rules o’er many a vassal crown.  
 ’Twas then but small, and slumber’d there  
 Like some young serpent in its lair,  
 Yet Nature in its frame was strong ;  
     Already, in its warlike youth,  
     The venom fester’d in its tooth,  
 And loudly hiss’d its forkèd tongue.  
 And there, against the Swedish land  
 With murdering steel and flaming brand  
 A fleet prepared to sail there lay ;  
 Thither Maria bends her way  
 ’Midst many a flag and many a sword,

And asks a soldier's place on board.  
With curious glance the leader eyed  
Her slender form, and thus replied;  
Methinks, fair youth, thou'lt cause more pain  
To Sweden's maidens than her men;  
One danger never need be fear'd,  
Lest foes should take thee by the beard.  
Yet war's first rudiments aright  
Thou here may'st learn;—'twill prove a fight  
For life or death;—for ought beside  
God and St. Nicholas provide!

## XX.

Fresh blew the breeze, high swell'd the sails,  
And foam'd beneath the bounding keels  
The billows. Soon before them lay,  
Empurpled by the evening ray,  
Sweden's bold rocks—as still they stand  
In Nature's majesty sublime,  
And scorn the force of waves and time,—  
The giant bulwarks of our land.  
They gain the shore at Sotaskjær,

A spot to faithful bosoms dear ;  
For on that rock, as Sagas tell,  
The mournful parting once befell  
Of Ingeborg and Hjalmar bold\*—  
There, when the hero's heart was cold,  
And Odin call'd him to his side,  
For hopeless love the maiden died ;  
And there her shade above the main  
Still sits and weeps her warrior slain,  
Our North's Leucatè ! though thy name  
Be soon forgot by vulgar fame ;  
Thy tale shall be remember'd long  
By every son of northern song !

## XXI.

Now towns and hamlets feed the flame,  
And women fly, and children scream  
In panic wild, for well they know  
The cruelties of Russian foe.  
And far and wide the tidings spread ;

\* The Story of Hjalmar and Ingeborg is told in the " Her-  
vara Saga," C. v.

And all around from tower and spire  
The bells ring out their larum dire—  
Alas! they cannot wake the dead.  
Ill-fated land! thy champions brave,  
Thy mightiest sons, are in their grave;  
And none to guard thy bounds remain  
Save beardless youths and aged men.  
And rude old-fashion'd arms they wield,—  
Swords that had gleam'd in many a field,  
When Gustaf Adolf bravely bore  
Our banners to the German shore.  
And halbards, which the foe had felt  
What time we cross'd the Danish Belt;  
And yeoman for the coming fight  
Strange cumbrous match-locks drag to light,  
Long since disused in battle-fray,  
And all unknown in modern day.  
Few and ill-arm'd they gather'd there,  
And yet they knew nor doubt nor fear.  
The foeman fought not hand to hand,  
On towering heights he took his stand,  
And from that chosen vantage-ground,  
War's sulphurous bolts he launch'd around

So thick, so fast, assault was vain,  
And valour's self recoil'd again ;  
Death thinn'd their broken ranks at will,  
And hurl'd them down the fatal hill.

XXII.

But who is he ? what warrior bold  
Active and strong as Thor of old  
Comes rushing toward the press amain,  
Where flight alone and terror reign ?  
Axel ! like angel from on high  
Sent in man's last extremity.  
On milk-white charger near and far  
He scours the field, and rules the war.  
“ Halt ! men of Sweden, on the plain,  
And close your shatter'd ranks again ;  
Commission'd by King Charles I come ;  
In his name charge the foeman home !  
‘ God and King Charles’ our battle-cry !”  
“ God and King Charles” their shouts reply.  
The rock, whence pour'd the deadly rain,  
Is in an instant storm'd and ta'en.

Then deeply raged the thirsty sword  
Of vengeance mid the barbarous horde ;  
The scatter'd foes resist no more ;  
And rushing headlong to the shore,  
The relics of the pirate band  
Their cables cut, and fly the strand.

## XXIII.

Now like some weary beast of prey,  
Red Slaughter slept upon the bent ;  
And issuing from her azure tent,  
The moon pour'd down her silent ray.  
Young Axel sought the bloody plain,  
And sadly mused he o'er the slain ;  
The ghastly dead alternate lie  
As each has grasp'd his enemy.  
Wouldst thou a real embrace behold  
Steadfast and true ? then go not there  
Where, in some bower a loving pair  
With smiles each other's form enfold ;  
But seek the battle-field, and see  
How hate, in death's last agony,

Can strain the foeman to its heart,  
 In clasp that never more shall part.  
 “ Alas our loves and joys take wing,  
 Inconstant as the breeze of spring,  
 But hate and sorrow keep their faith,  
 And cling around us even in death.”  
 Such were his thoughts; when through the gloom  
 These mournful faltering accents come,—  
 “ Axel, I thirst! Oh! come thou nigh,  
 And bid me farewell ere I die.  
 Alas! too well the voice he knew,  
 And starting, through the darkness flew  
 To find—an unknown youth who lay,  
     Wounded and bleeding 'gainst a rock  
     Where he had fallen in battle shock—  
 The moon lights up with transient ray  
 That ashy cheek, that clammy brow,—  
 Great God in Heaven! is it thou?

XXIV.

Yes! it was she—with stifled smart  
 She says in whisper faint and slight,

“ Good-even, Axel ! nay, good-night !  
For death is creeping round my heart.  
Oh ! ask not why I’ve hither flown ;  
I follow’d love and him alone.  
When fate’s dark shadows o’er us wave,  
And man beholds the opening grave,  
And death is knocking at the door—  
Ah ! then how different from before  
Seems life with all its trifles vain !  
Each fleeting joy, each transient pain !  
Yet love so pure, so bright as ours  
Shall find its place in Heaven’s own bowers.  
That secret oath I long’d to know,  
Amid the stars I’ll read it now ;  
Thy truth, thy innocence shall shine  
As clearly as those fires divine.  
Unwisely have I done withal,  
And thou wilt sorrow for my fall ;  
Forgive me then for every tear,  
That thou shalt shed upon my bier.  
Bereft of mother, father, brother,  
Thou wert my brother, father, mother ;  
Thou wert my all ! Oh ! Axel, swear



That even in death thou hold'st me dear !  
 Thou swearest then ; oh ! now I've heard  
 The fairest, sweetest, happiest word  
 That life could speak—thy dying maid  
 Will never from thy bosom fade ;  
 Her ashes in thy land shall dwell,  
 The land that thou canst guard so well.  
 Look, Axel, look, across the moon  
 There flits a little cloud, and soon  
 'Twill pass away ; yet ere its shade  
 Can be withdrawn, I shall be dead.  
 And then my soul on yonder strand,  
 The boundary of death's shadowy land,  
 Shall pray for thee, and from afar  
 Look down upon thee like a star.  
 Plant on my grave a southern rose,  
 And when it dies 'neath wintery snows,  
 Oh ! think upon thy buried maid  
 Like it in northern snow-drift laid ;  
 Whose bloom was wither'd in a day.—  
 Axel ! the cloud has pass'd away,  
 Farewell, farewell ! then once she sigh'd  
 And press'd her lover's hand, and died.

## XXV.

Then riseth from Tartarean gulf  
Death's younger brother, not himself,  
Pale spectral Madness, gaunt and bare,  
With poppies in his streaming hair ;  
That one-while gazeth up on high,  
    And now upon the earth beneath ;  
    While idiot smiles his shrunk lips wreathe,  
And tears bedew his half-glazed eye.  
On Axel's brain his hand he laid,  
And since that hour the crazed youth stray'd  
With sleepless eye and tireless feet,  
    About her gravemound ; as, 'tis said,  
    The spirits of the unblest dead  
Around some buried treasure flit.  
And day and night, the strand along  
Swept the sad echoes of his song.

## XXVI.

“ Silence ! ye billows, rage no more,  
Nor beat so wildly on the shore ;

Darkly and hatefully ye roll,  
Ye scare the dreams that soothe my soul;  
For death is borne upon your flood,  
And every wave is red with blood.  
Of late a wounded youth lay there,  
(His grave I strew with roses fair)  
Whose features pale resemblance bore,  
Methinks to one I've seen before;  
Whom well I know, and hope to bring  
To Sweden with the new-born Spring.  
They say my bride is gone to rest  
With grassy turf upon her breast;  
They tell me that the wild-flowers grow  
O'er that true heart that sleeps below;—  
It cannot be! full in my sight  
On yonder rock she sat by night;  
Wan, as they paint the dead, she lay;  
Perchance 'twas but the moon's pale ray.  
Cold was her lip and cold her cheek,  
Perchance 'twas but the north-wind bleak.  
But when I look'd upon her face,  
And sought her in a fond embrace,  
She laid her finger on my brow,

Heavy and dark—I feel it now.  
Then all is changed, and on my gaze  
Breaks in the light of other days,  
Those radiant days too bright to last,—  
Those blissful days for ever past.—  
There stood a palace in the grove,  
It was the dwelling of my love.  
Half-dead I lay in murderous strife,  
But, with one kiss, she gave me life;  
Her heart she gave into these arms,  
With all its wealth, its warmth, its charms.  
Alas! it beats for me no more,  
'Tis wither'd, frozen—all is o'er!  
All lost! ye stars above that blaze  
Henceforth for ever quench your rays!  
One star alone in Heaven there stood  
For me—and that has set in blood;—  
Blood reeks upon the tainted air!  
'Tis on my hands! 'tis everywhere!

## XXVII.

Each night on Sota's rock he mourns,  
Nor quits the spot when day returns;

When evening falls he still is seen  
With death-like sorrow-stricken mien.  
One morn they found him sitting there  
With folded hands, as though in prayer ;  
With tears upon his visage pale  
Half-frozen in the morning-gale,  
A stiffen'd corse—its stony eyes  
Bent on the grave in which she lies.

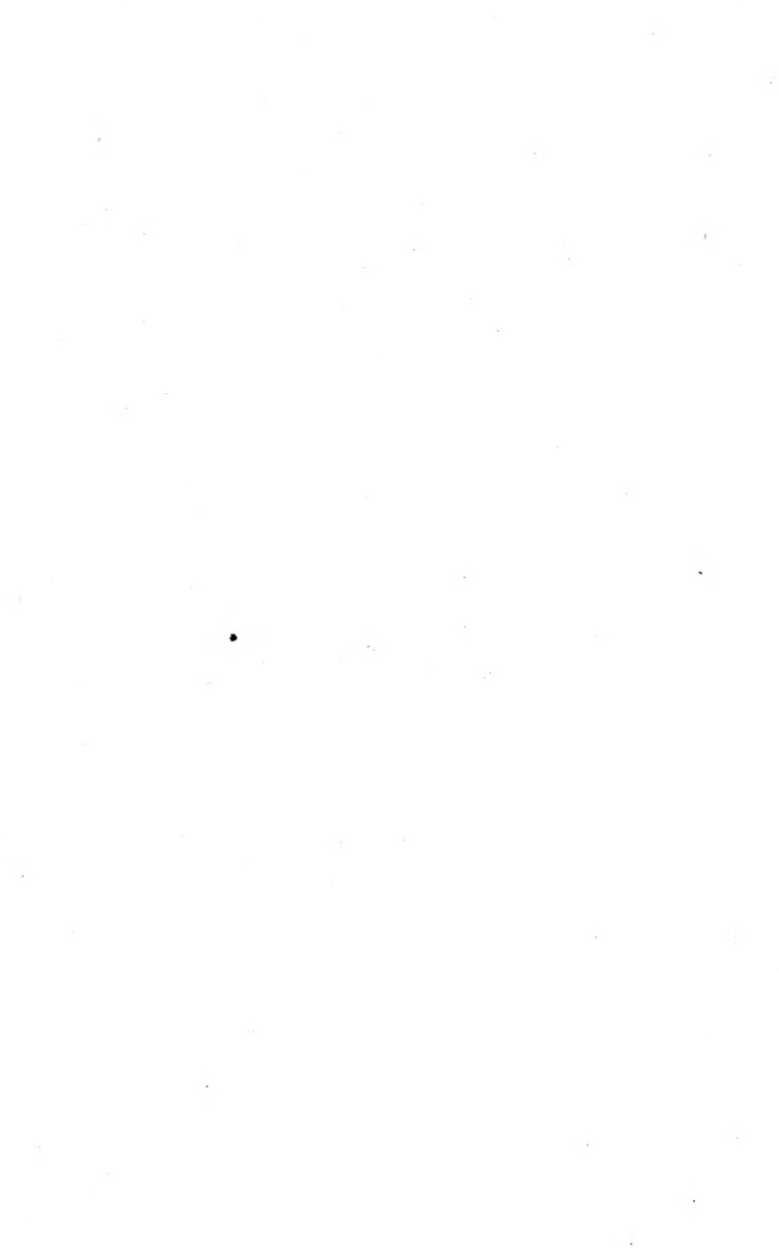
## XXVIII.

Such was the simple tale I heard,  
So strongly that my spirit stirr'd ;  
Though thrice ten years since then are pass'd,  
It haunts my memory to the last.  
With impress deep, with outline sharp, .  
    Such rede is graven on the breast  
    Of infant scald and bard, to rest  
Like Aslaug in King Heimer's\* harp.  
Then forth in after-days to shine,  
And vindicate its race divine,  
With golden locks, and raiment sheen,

\* See " Volsunga Saga," C. LII.

And eagle-eye, and princely mien—  
The child's blue heaven would seem to hold  
A thousand lyres of burnish'd gold;  
Each radiant form, each brilliant theme,  
That gilds the poet's after-dream,  
More fair, more bright before him pass,  
As seen in childhood's mystic glass.  
And so, whene'er the wild-birds bring  
Their melodies to greet the Spring;  
When riseth from the eastern wave  
The moon, like ghost that leaves the grave,  
And sheds the pallid hues of death  
On hills above and dales beneath,—  
Then airy voices in mine ear  
Are whispering; and I seem to hear  
The old, the well-remember'd strain  
Of Axel and his bride again.









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